

Serving in the Public Ministry of the Gospel is a Privilege and an Honor

By John M. Brenner

My father served in the public ministry for forty-eight years before retiring at the age of seventy-two. From my earliest youth it was evident to me that he loved what he was doing. His work ethic was admirable. His devotion to the ministry was undeniable. He had many challenges to face while he was a pastor and experienced many of the frustrations that are common to all of us who serve, but his love for the ministry never wavered. He has now been retired for several years, and often when I talk to him he reminds me what a privilege it is to serve in the ministry. He urges me to tell the men I am teaching to enjoy the work for which they are training. And sometimes he ends the conversation with these words: "I wish I could still be a pastor."

Both the assignment you have given me and the celebration of my twenty-fifth anniversary in the ministry some time ago have given me the opportunity to reflect on my father's words and the attitude and convictions that lie behind them. But any such reflection must be based on God's Word. For the ministry is the Lord's, not ours. His Word alone can give us the strength to serve. His gospel alone can motivate us to carry out the work he has assigned to us. The gospel alone can instill in us the joy of serving in the face of the problems, challenges, and frustrations each of us face as we strive to carry out our calling to God's glory.

In this presentation, through a series of theses based on God's Word, we will review what the Bible teaches about the public ministry of the gospel and those who serve in it. To understand the scriptural teaching of the public ministry we need to consider what the Bible teaches about the church. The doctrine of the ministry makes little sense without a knowledge of what the church is and what the church does.

1. The church is the sum total of those who trust in Jesus as their Savior. Since only believers are members of the church and we cannot see faith in a person's heart, the church in its essence is invisible.

The Greek word which we translate as "church" is *ekklesia*, etymologically, those who have been called out. In its ordinary use the word had no special religious significance, but the Holy Spirit's use of it in the New Testament enriched its meaning. The church is comprised of those who have been called out of unbelief to faith. It consists of those who trust in Jesus as their Savior. That can be seen in the way that St. Paul addresses the church in Corinth. He writes, "To the *church* of God in Corinth, to those *sanctified* in Christ Jesus..." (1 Co 1:2). St. Peter, addressing *God's elect*...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit (1 Pe 1:1), reminds them, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who *called you out* of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pe 2:9).

The church consists of the elect who have been called out of the darkness of unbelief and sanctified in Christ Jesus. Therefore only those who have been brought to saving faith are members of the church. Because we cannot look into someone's heart to see faith, the church is invisible to human eyes, that is, the members of the church are known with certainty only to God. "The Lord knows those who are his" (2 Ti 2:19).

But if the church is essentially invisible, how do we know where the church is? How do we know when the church is present?

2. We recognize that the church is present by the marks of the church, the gospel rightly proclaimed and the sacraments rightly administered. These marks don't make the invisible church visible, but indicate its presence.

Only those who believe in Jesus as their Savior are members of the church. How do people come to trust in Jesus? The Holy Spirit brings them to faith through the means of grace, the gospel in word and sacrament. As Paul writes to the Romans, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? ... Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Ro 10:13-14, 17). Through baptism the Holy Spirit creates new life (faith) in us. "He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Tit 3:5-6). Through the sacrament of Holy Communion the Holy Spirit strengthens us and sustains us with Christ's very body and blood and the personal assurance that his body and blood were given and shed for each of us individually (1 Co 11:23-29, Lk 22:17-20).

Wherever the gospel is rightly proclaimed and the sacraments are rightly administered the Holy Spirit will be doing his work of bringing people to faith. As the Lord assured his prophet Isaiah, "My word....will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11). This truth is so certain that Luther declares, "And even if there were no other sign than this alone, it would still suffice to prove that a Christian, holy people must exist there, for God's Word cannot be without God's people and conversely, God's people cannot be without God's Word."¹

The reason that we say that the church is present where the gospel is "rightly" taught and the sacraments are "rightly" administered is to emphasize the truth that the Holy Spirit doesn't work through false teaching, but only through his Word. As our WELS Theses on the Church and Ministry explain:

We rejoice in the fact that God in His grace and mercy can and does awaken, sustain, and preserve believers also in the midst of erring congregations and church bodies. I Kings 19:18. We remember, however, that he does so not through the errors that are taught and condoned there, but only through the true Gospel message that is still heard in these erring churches.²

3. It is God's will that Christians gather around the means of grace to carry out the tasks assigned to the church, but he has not prescribed the specific forms of those gatherings.

The church is an assembly of those who have been called to faith in Christ. The writer to the Hebrews encourages us, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb 10:25). Christians recognize the importance of gathering together with other Christians for mutual admonition, encouragement, and growth in the knowledge and understanding of God's Word.

The Bible encourages God's people to gather together, but it never prescribes the outward forms those gatherings are to take. Whenever and wherever people are gathered around the gospel or on behalf of it, the church is present. As our Savior assures us, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I with them" (Mt 18:20).

4. God has assigned one task to the church: the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments.

During the forty days between our Savior's resurrection and his ascension into heaven he met with his disciples several times to demonstrate that he was alive and to give them further instruction. He gave a special commission to his followers (i.e., the church). This commission is found in several places in the Scriptures. St. Matthew records, "Therefore go and make, disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and

¹ *Luther's Works*, American Edition, Vol 41, p 150.

² *Doctrinal Statements of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (Milwaukee: Commission on Inter-Church Relations, 1970), p 8-9.

of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:18-19). St. Mark reports these words of our Savior: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mk 16:15-16). In Luke's gospel our Savior says, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer, and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk 24:46-47). On the very day of his ascension Jesus told his followers, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Ac 1:8).

Jesus did not commission the church to overthrow the political establishment or to change the structures of society. It is not the church's role to wield the law as a curb in society or to use the power of the sword given to the government to spread the gospel or to enforce correct doctrine or "Christian" living. When Jesus told Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:36), he was rejecting the accusation that he had come into this world to establish a political kingdom or wield political power.

God has established the government as his agent of wrath to punish the evildoer, to provide law and order in society, and to provide for the physical and material safety of the inhabitants of this world (Ro 13:1-7). The government has responsibility over the physical requirements of human life. The church deals with spiritual matters. The church is the poorer when its public ministers forget the great commission of the Savior to meddle in the affairs of this world. The Augsburg Confession explains:

Therefore, since the power of the Church grants eternal things, and is exercised only by the ministry of the Word, it does not interfere with civil government; no more than the art of singing interferes with civil government. For civil government deals with other things than does the Gospel. The civil rulers defend not minds but bodies and bodily things against manifest injuries, and restrain men with the sword and bodily punishments, in order to preserve civil justice and peace.

Therefore the power of the Church and the civil power must not be confounded. The power of the church has its own commission to teach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments. Let it not break into the office of another; let it not transfer the kingdoms of this world; let it not abrogate the laws of civil rulers; let it not abolish lawful obedience; let it not interfere with judgments concerning civil ordinances or contracts; let it not prescribe laws to civil rulers concerning the form of the Commonwealth.³

Although the individual Christian as a citizen has the right and the duty to participate in civil government and work for just laws, the church (the gathering of believers) is not commissioned by God to rule or engage in political activism.

The church may carry out charitable work as the church in Jerusalem did (Ac 6). The church, however, will want to make sure that it always keeps the gospel ministry as its priority. We will want to make sure that we do not divorce charitable work from the proclamation of the gospel, but will look for the opportunities which charitable work provides for the preaching of the gospel.⁴

5. God has given the church, that is, every believer in it, the keys of the kingdom and the authority to administer those keys. The exercise of the keys is the gospel ministry.

The ministry of the keys is the authority to loose and bind sins, to proclaim the gospel (*Predigtamt* or *Predigtendienst*). The purpose of this office or authority or ministry or use of the keys is to provide the means that the Holy Spirit uses to bring people to saving faith. As the Augsburg Confession explains,

³ *Augsburg Confession*, Article XXVIII, par. 10-13, Triglotta.

⁴ Armin Schuetze, "The Church's Social Concerns—Scriptural Imperatives and Limitations," *Our Great Heritage*, edited by Lyle Lange. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991) vol. III, p 404-423.

That we may obtain this faith, *the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted*. For through Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel.⁵

Was this authority given to the apostles alone? Or only to professional clergy? Or to every Christian? We need to examine the Scriptures.

When our Savior walked this earth, he created quite a stir. No one had ever seen anyone perform the kind of miracles he was able to perform. No one among his contemporaries spoke with authority as Jesus did. Many people had come to the conclusion that Jesus was a great prophet or perhaps one of the Old Testament prophets come back to life.

When Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was, Simon Peter answered for the group.

"You are the Christ, the son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Mt 16:16-19).

Our Savior builds his church on the rock, the truth that he is the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Jesus has given the keys of the kingdom of heaven to all those to whom the Father has revealed that truth as he had to Peter. God's forgiveness opens the gates of heaven. Believers have the authority to announce God's forgiveness to their fellow sinners.

It is evident that this authority was not given to Peter alone because Jesus repeated this commission to all of the apostles when he appeared to them after his resurrection. He said to them, "'Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' And with that he breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven'" (Jn 20:21-22). The apostles had the authority to speak in Jesus' name to tell penitent sinners that their sins are forgiven and to tell the impenitent that their sins are not forgiven. Jesus died for the sins of all. All are forgiven. But the impenitent do not have God's forgiveness because by their impenitence they have rejected his forgiveness.

The authority to forgive sins or preach the gospel was given not only to the apostles, but to all Christians of all times (Mt 18:18-20). That is clear from the wording of the great commission. "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:19-20). Jesus' promise to be with his disciples to the very end of the age (end of the world) demonstrates that his commission was meant not just for those who first heard it but for all his followers until judgment day.

Some might still want to argue that the authority to forgive sins or proclaim the gospel is given only to those who serve in the public ministry. St. Peter, writing to the *elect* (believers) living throughout the region we know today as modern Turkey, declares, "But you are a chosen nation, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pe 2:9). To praise someone is to tell others the praiseworthy things he has done. To praise God means to tell others that he sent his Son to be the sacrificial Lamb who lived and died to take away the sins of the world. To praise God is to tell the repentant sinner that although he deserves to be punished forever, God has forgiven his sins in Christ Jesus. That gospel message brings people into the kingdom of God. That message is the key which opens heaven. Every Christian is a priest before God (universal priesthood of believers). Every Christian has the authority and the responsibility to seek the lost and the erring and to speak Christ's words of forgiveness. As our Lord tells us,

⁵ *Augsburg Confession*, Art. V, par. 1, Triglotta.

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established in the mouths of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Mt 18:15-18).

St. Paul, writing to the Christians in Galatia, encourages them, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each others burdens, and in this way fulfill the law of Christ" (Ga 6:1-2).

Christians carry out this responsibility and privilege when they instruct and discipline their children, speak to those who have fallen into sin, or tell their neighbors, acquaintances, friends, and relatives about their Savior. They do these things privately as individual Christians concerned about the eternal welfare of others.

Although every Christian has the authority to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments, God has also instituted the public ministry of the gospel, a special way of practicing the one gospel ministry which belongs to every believer.

6. The public ministry of the gospel is the exercise of the keys in the name and on behalf of other Christians. God has established the public ministry for the sake of good order and the welfare of his people. God has not, however, prescribed the forms the public ministry is to take.

Ministry (*diakonia*) is service. A minister (*diakonos*) is one who serves. The gospel ministry is the service of proclaiming the good news of forgiveness of sins in the crucified and risen Savior. The public ministry is a special God-ordained way of practicing the one ministry of the gospel which belongs to every Christian.

When we use the term *public* ministry we do not mean public in the sense of in a crowd or in a public place. By *public* we mean *representative*. The public ministry is representative ministry. A public minister is one who represents God's people. He serves in their name and at their request. Prof. John Meyer put it this way:

The terms *public* and *private* must here be determined by the relationship to the church. Anything is to be considered public as soon as the church is connected with it, while the same thing remains private if the church is not connected with it, no matter how public it may be in the ordinary sense of the word....Now all men who preach or teach the gospel, not as private Christians, but because a group of Christians has appointed them to do so in their stead, do it *publicly*. They represent the church in their work.⁶

All Christians are spiritually equal before God. But not every Christian is equally gifted to serve in the public ministry. Every Christian has the authority to proclaim the gospel and administer the sacraments. But if every Christian tried to exercise this authority in a gathering of Christians, there would be nothing but chaos. For the sake of good order some Christians are asked to serve in the name of the rest. As St. Paul had to remind the Corinthians, "God is not a God of disorder but of peace...Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Co 14:33, 40).

The public ministry did not simply evolve through human effort nor is it merely a convenient human arrangement. God instituted the public ministry for the benefit of his people. We see that in the way he established qualifications for those who serve in the ministry (1 Ti 3:1-12). Those in the ministry are *gifts* which God has given to his church. As St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "It was he (the ascended Savior) who *gave*

⁶ John P. Meyer, *Studies in the Augsburg Confession*. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995) p 182-183.

some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:11-13).

Notice that in apostolic times there were a variety of offices in the public ministry. Yet we will search in vain for any command establishing any particular form of the ministry. God instituted the public ministry, but he did not prescribe forms for the ministry. There is no ceremonial law or levitical priesthood in the New Testament. God gives his people amazing freedom to establish ministerial positions to fit their needs.

7. No one has the right to exercise the keys in the name of other Christians unless he is properly called. God calls people into the public ministry through the church, but he has not prescribed the calling procedure. The church has the right to establish different forms of the public ministry to meet various needs and circumstances.

Since all Christians possess the keys equally, no one has the right to exercise the keys in the place of others within a group of Christians or in their name or on their behalf unless they ask him or her to do so. To assume an office in the public ministry without being called to do so would be arrogance and an imposition on God's people.

Although every Christian has the authority to proclaim the gospel, every Christian is not equally qualified to do so publicly. God has given different gifts and abilities to different people. While every Christian has the authority to proclaim the gospel and to administer the sacraments, it would be disorderly for each Christian to exercise that authority in a gathering of Christians. Since God commands that in the church "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Co 14: 40), a group of Christians will designate an individual or individuals to, exercise the keys in their name.

When the church calls an individual into the public ministry, it is actually God, who is calling that person through them. St. Paul indicates that when he writes that those in the public ministry are gifts of God. "It is he who gave some to be apostles, some to prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers..." (Eph 4:11). Paul encourages the elders at Ephesus, "Guard yourselves and all the flock of which *the Holy Spirit has made you overseers*" (Ac 20:28). God issues the call through his people. That is why we call it a divine call. God places the individual into his specific office.

Though God called the apostles directly (an *immediate* call), we have no promise in Scripture that he will continue to do so today. If someone claims an immediate call, he has to be able to confirm that call with signs and miracles. "The things that *mark* an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance" (2 Co 12:12). His miracles in turn would have to be confirmed by comparing his teaching to the teaching of the apostles (1 Jn 4:1,6).

We can properly speak of an inner call only in the sense of someone having the desire to serve in the ministry. Those who desire the ministry desire a noble task, Paul writes (1 Ti 3:1). But that desire does not give a person the right to impose himself on a group of Christians.

God calls people into the public ministry *through* the church (a *mediate* call). The right to call is implied in the keys and is necessitated by the command to do all things in a fitting and orderly way (1 Co 14:40). In his apostolic practice Paul recognized calls issued through human beings as legitimate calls (Ac 14:23; 2 Ti 1:6; 2:2; Tit 1:5).⁷ Our Lord, however, has not prescribed the calling procedure that the church is to follow. We hear no command of God establishing the method we are to use.

God has given the church amazing freedom to establish different forms of the public ministry to meet its needs as circumstances dictate. A variety of forms of the ministry is assumed in the "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers" Paul speaks of in his letter to the Ephesians. Paul seems to indicate divisions of duties or functions of the ministry in the early church when he writes to Timothy, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching"

⁷ *Senior Dogmatics Notes*, (Mequon: The Seminary Mimeo Co., 1985), p 164.

(1 Ti 5:17). The ability to establish forms of the ministry is evident in the calling of the seven deacons (Ac 6) to do charitable work in the Jerusalem congregation. However, we generally distinguish between such service or ministry as described in Acts 6 and the public ministry of the gospel.

8. God calls sinful human beings into the public ministry so that they may serve him by serving other sinful human beings.

No one deserves the privilege of serving in the public ministry. We don't even deserve to be called God's people. From the moment of our conception we are not what God demands that we be. From that moment we are sinful. We lack the perfect righteousness that God requires of us. By nature we were alienated from God. By nature we deserve his wrath and condemnation.

In eternity, however, God planned our salvation. He chose us to be his own. He sent his Son to be our Substitute. Jesus lived a perfect life for us. He took our place before God's judgment seat and was declared guilty for our sins. On the cross on Calvary he bore the full brunt of God's righteous anger over our sins and suffered the penalty that we deserved. The sinless Son of God died and was buried. But God raised him from the dead as a demonstration that he accepted his sacrifice as payment in full for our sins. God has declared the whole world innocent or forgiven, because he declared Jesus guilty in our place.

In his mercy God has called us to faith in our Savior through his word and sacraments. Through faith we have received all the benefits of Jesus' work of atonement. When our heavenly Father looks at us he no longer sees our lives of imperfection, but he sees the perfect righteousness of his own Son. He remembers our sins no more.

Yet until the day we die we remain sinful human beings. There is a constant struggle within us between our sinful nature and our new man. As St. Paul puts it so clearly, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have a desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing" (Ro 7:17-19). That is why we pray every day, "Forgive us our trespasses."

In spite of our sinfulness, God has given us an amazing privilege. He has called people like you and me to the most glorious work on earth, the work of proclaiming his gospel of salvation. He could have chosen his holy angels to proclaim the gospel. He gave that privilege to them on a few occasions. He sent them to announce our Savior's birth to the shepherds near Bethlehem and also to announce his resurrection to the women at the tomb. From a human point of view it would certainly make more sense to entrust that precious message of salvation to those perfect and powerful creatures. But God has entrusted the task of proclaiming that message to people like us. He has condescended to call sinful human beings like you and me into the public ministry. What an amazing honor and privilege!

St. Paul puts it this way: "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake...But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Co 4:5,7).

It is important for those of us in the public ministry always to remember who we are—sinners declared innocent for Christ's sake. It is equally important to remember that the people we are serving are also sinners declared innocent for Christ's sake. We are not serving perfect people. Yet each and every one of them is a precious soul for whom Jesus died. The children you teach are young Christians. That means that they are immature. They will make mistakes. It also means that they have both an old Adam and a new man which are in conflict with each other. Sometimes they will lose the struggle and fall into sin. Sometimes they will behave in a most "unchristian" way. But remember that the struggle is not between them and you. It is between them and them—between their old Adam, and their new man. Your work is to help lead them toward the goal of Christian maturity. You do that by patiently admonishing them and by announcing God's forgiveness. God has entrusted to your care those precious souls for whom Jesus died. What an awesome responsibility and privilege!

When we reach out to the unbeliever with God's message of forgiveness in Christ we are offering the most precious treasure anyone could ever offer. God is using us to proclaim the message that can rescue them from the eternal punishment of hell and give them the eternal joy of heaven.

9. God has established qualifications for the public ministry.

Although the gospel ministry (ministry of the keys) belongs to every Christian, not every Christian is qualified to serve in the public ministry. God has established the qualifications that he requires in those who serve. In his first letter to Timothy St. Paul speaks of qualifications for *overseers* or bishops, those who have a call to the broadest form of the public ministry. Today that would be roughly equivalent to the pastoral ministry. Next he lists qualifications for *deacons*, those “who took care of collecting and dispersing the congregation's finances, looking after widows and the sick, in general administering the affairs of the congregation.”⁸ The qualifications in both cases, however, apply in a general way to all who serve in the public ministry.

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons (1 Ti 3:2-10).

Those in the public ministry are to be *above reproach*. The King James Version translated this term as *blameless*. It is important to note that "blamelessness must not be confused with sinlessness. Sinlessness is a qualification which could be met by no one except Christ. Blamelessness implies that one cannot be blamed for offenses by which either those from without or within would be disturbed or hindered in their faith."⁹

Some of the qualities which make a person *above reproach* are being temperate (not give to extremes), self-controlled, respectable, not given to much wine (not a drunkard or an addict), not violent or quarrelsome or having a tendency to fly off the handle, but gentle. The public minister is to be the husband of but one wife. That is, he is to be innocent "of anything that even hints at inappropriate sexual behavior."¹⁰ He disciplines his children. He is not to be greedy or materialistic. Those who are lovers of money are really serving a master other than Christ.

The called worker should not be someone new in the faith, but one who has been tested. He is to be a mature Christian.

Those in the teaching and preaching ministry are to be *able to teach*. Teachers need the natural gifts of basic intelligence to grasp the truths that are to be taught and they need the ability to *communicate* those truths. Being able to teach also implies enhancing those natural gifts through training and education.

Nowhere does the Bible forbid women to serve in public ministry. When the ministry, however, involves the exercise of authority over men, God requires that men alone serve (1 Co 14:34-35; 1 Ti 2:11-14).

⁸ Armin W. Schuetze, *The People's Bible—1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991) p. 56-56. See Prof. Schuetze's entire discussion on pages 47-59.

⁹ Robert J. Voss, "The Doctrine of the Call," an essay presented to the Arizona-California District Convention, June 12-14, 1984, p 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 16.

Gifts and abilities will vary among called workers. Visible results and success may not always be evident in the ministry. But pastors and teachers can take comfort in the fact that God doesn't list the ability to produce visible results as a requirement for the ministry but *faithfulness*—*faithfulness* to God's Word and *faithfulness* in carrying out the responsibilities God's people assign to them. As the Scriptures declare, "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Co 4:1-2).

10. The call confers the office of the public ministry and establishes the scope of the office.

Through the call God's people delegate the work that belongs to all of them to an individual who acts in their name and on their behalf. The call, therefore, establishes what work is to be done in their name. I would have no right to stand before you today to make this presentation if you had not asked me to do so. You have given me a very limited call to serve you, in this way.

In our circles the call of the parish pastor is broadest in scope. The pastor usually is given oversight of virtually every aspect of the congregation's work. My call as a seminary professor is much narrower in scope. The synod through the seminary governing board has called me to teach our future pastors in two specific subject areas. Your call may be to teach first and second grade or sixth grade or to serve as principal. In each case the call determines the scope of the work which is to be done. Understanding what is meant by the scope of the call will keep us from interfering in another person's area of responsibility.

We will not, however, hide behind the scope of our call when asked by the congregation to do something by saying, "That's not in my call!" Since the ministry by definition is *service* and a *privilege*, we will express that spirit of willing service and cooperation in our relation with those who have called us.

When we speak of the scope of the call we are not implying a difference of rank among called workers (though the call may assign different people different leadership responsibilities). The idea of rank in the ministry is foreign to the very concept of ministry.¹¹ Jesus warns against that spirit.

But you are not to be called "Rabbi," for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And, do not call anyone on earth "father," for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called "teacher," for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted (Mt 23:8-12).

A person enters the public ministry through the divine call. Ordination is an ecclesiastical rite which is a public confirmation or ratification of the call. It is a public declaration that the candidate has the qualifications necessary for the office to which he has been called. However, ordination does not make a person a pastor. The call makes a person a pastor. When a person retires or resigns from a call, he ceases to be in the public ministry.

11. The calling body owes respect, cooperation, and sufficient financial support to those whom it calls to serve in the full-time public ministry.

God's people are not, in competition with each other, but are working toward the same goal. When a congregation calls someone to serve in their name, it is self-evident that they stand ready to cooperate in the work they have called him or her to do. Called workers can encourage cooperation by displaying an openness toward the congregation and a willingness to listen and to serve. As St. Peter writes, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; *not lording it over* those entrusted to you, but being

¹¹ Please see Erwin Scharf's comments on rank in the ministry, "The Call to the Use of the Keys," *Our Great Heritage*, Lyle Lange, ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991) vol. III, p 504-505.

examples to the flock" (1 Pe 5:2-3). Called workers will remember that they do not *demand* respect or trust, but earn it by their work, attitude, and character.

God's people will also highly regard those who serve the Lord in the holy ministry. Paul writes, "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God" (1 Co 4:1). The writer to the Hebrews instructs us, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Heb 13:17). We are to honor those who have served in the public ministry of the gospel by remembering them and imitating their faith. "Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Heb 13:7). Paul encourages the Thessalonians, "Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord, and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard *because of their work*" (1 Th 5:12-13).

While the called worker will avoid every impression of being "greedy for money," the calling body will recognize that "the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel" (1 Co 9:15). Paul reminds the Corinthians, "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?" (1 Co 9: 11) The congregation will also remember that "the elders who direct the affairs of the congregation are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is *preaching* and *teaching*" (1 Ti 5:17). Congregations and calling bodies honor God when they honor those whom God has given them. By honoring their called workers they are also encouraging young people to consider training for the public ministry. Honoring called workers includes providing for their material needs. As Armin Schuetze explains:

Thus the manner in which the church provides for those who serve well is a way of showing honor. Put into today's terms, by the salary it pays and the benefits it provides, a congregation shows honor and respect for its called workers. It hardly shows "double honor" if their support is kept at poverty or minimum subsistence level. Neither should the pastor expect, however, that "double honor" requires that those he serves make him a man of wealth.¹²

Our willingness to serve doesn't depend on our salary but on our recognition of the privilege God has entrusted to us.

12. Serving in the public ministry of the gospel is a marvelous privilege that involves awesome responsibilities.

The great American Lutheran theologian of the nineteenth century, C. F. W. Walther, recognized the glorious privilege of the public ministry. The words he addressed to the seminarians entrusted to his care are equally applicable to teachers or to those serving in any other office of the public ministry of the gospel.

When a place has been assigned to a Lutheran candidate of theology where he is to discharge the office of a Lutheran minister, that place ought to be to him the dearest, most beautiful and most precious spot on earth. He should be unwilling to exchange it for a kingdom. Whether it is a metropolis or in a small town, on a bleak prairie or in a clearing in the forest, in a flourishing settlement or in a desert, to him it should be a miniature paradise. Do not the blessed angels descend from heaven with great joy whenever the Father in heaven sends them to minister to those who are heirs of salvation? Why, then, should we poor sinners be unwilling to hurry after them with great joy to any place where we can lead other men, our fellow-sinners to salvation?¹³

¹² Schuetze, *Peoples Bible—1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, p 82.

¹³ C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction between Law and Gospel*, trans. by W. H. T. Dau, (St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1928) p 207-208.

When we recognize the privilege God has given us in calling us to be his representatives, the work he has given us to do will be central in our thinking. The geographical location or outward circumstances of the congregation will make little difference. Our focus in the ministry is on the *why* and the *what*, not the *where*.

God has entrusted the public ministry of the gospel to sinful human beings. He uses people like us to rescue souls from hell. St. Paul could never get over the mercy God had shown him and the privilege God had given him in calling him to be his messenger. "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy....Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst" (1 Ti 1:13-13, 15).

Because the work of the ministry is a matter of spiritual life and death, it is not to be taken lightly. It involves the eternal welfare of souls for whom Jesus died. God emphasized the serious responsibility of this work when he commissioned the prophet Ezekiel.

Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, "O wicked man, you will surely die," and you do not speak, out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the, wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not. do so, he will die for his sins, but you will have, saved yourself (Eze 33:7,79).

Because of the serious nature of the responsibility of the public ministry James cautions, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (Jas 3:1).

Yet the office of the ministry involves such a glorious service that the holy angels might well be envious. When God commissioned Ezekiel he gave him not only a message of warning, but also a glorious proclamation of forgiveness.

Son of man, say to the house of Israel, "This is what you are saying: 'Our offenses and sins weigh us down, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?'" Say to them, "As I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Eze33:10-11).

St. Paul calls ministers of the gospel ambassadors of Christ. They are called to be God's spokesmen to proclaim to the world the good news of forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God.

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God was making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Co 5:18-21).

13. The ability to serve in the ministry comes from God. The gospel that called workers proclaim and the sacraments they administer are powerful and effective. God grants the success he desires in his own good time and according to his plan and purpose.

St. Paul wrote concerning the ministry, "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. *And who is equal to such a task?* (2 Co 2:16). The answer to Paul's question is simple and clear. None of us are equal to the work of the ministry on our own. Our ability to serve, our competency, comes from our gracious God. As Paul declares, "Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (1 Co 3:5-6). Paul recognized that it wasn't his flowery language, his persuasive style, or his winning personality that brought results in the ministry. God produced them. The Apostle confessed, "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow" (2 Co 3:6-7).

Paul knew where the power for the ministry lies. He declared, "I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Ro 1:16). His trust in the power of the gospel can be seen in the way he carried out his work in Corinth. The Greek culture greatly admired eloquence and the clever debater. Yet Paul did not play to the Corinthians' predilections. He wanted them to fix their eyes on Jesus not on him.

When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith may rest not on men's wisdom, but on God's power (1 Co 2:1-5).

The sacraments are also powerful and effective for accomplishing God's purpose. Concerning baptism Paul writes,

But when the kindness and love of God appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life (Ti 3:4-7).

We can be confident that God will accomplish what pleases him because the Holy Spirit works through the means of grace to bring people to faith, to preserve them in faith, and to produce the fruits of faith he seeks. As God promised Isaiah,

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa 55: 10-11).

The Augsburg Confession puts it this way: "That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given who works faith *where and when it pleases God* in them that hear the Gospel."¹⁴

14. Serving in the public ministry of the gospel demands our best efforts.

¹⁴ *Augsburg Confession*, Art. IV, 1-2 Triglotta.

Even though the ultimate success of our work lies in God's hands and his powerful means of grace, we dare never become lazy or sloppy in the ministry. God's love and mercy toward us will lead us to serve him with all of our hearts. Love for his Word will lead us to proclaim it clearly and faithfully. Love for precious souls for whom Jesus died will lead us to make every effort to serve them with the gospel. The ministry demands our best. God expects no less.

Paul writes, "So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful" (1 Co 4:1-2). He encourages Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Ti 2:15). He addresses his younger co-worker with the greatest urgency concerning the ministry:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine (2 Tm 4:1-3).

15. Those who serve in the public ministry can expect problems in this life, but they have the comfort that they have been called by God, they are precious in his sight, and they will be blessed by him.

As called workers we can expect problems in the ministry. We should not expect our society or the news media or the entertainment industry to honor us as we carry out our Lord's commands. As Jesus warns,

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you, "No servant is greater than his master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also (Jn 15:18-20).

Though the world might heap scorn on those who proclaim the gospel, God honors them. Through the prophet Isaiah, he declares, "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isa 52:7)

Satan will do his best to disrupt our work, to undermine our ministry, and to throw roadblocks in our way. He knows that he can cause great harm if he can interfere with the work of the ministry. He is clever and wily. He knows our weaknesses and the weaknesses of the people we serve. He sometimes succeeds in leading us to act our worst. The children we teach, the people we serve, and our colleagues in the ministry are sinful. Sometimes they will greatly disappoint us. Sometimes they will cause us problems.

Our own sinful nature also hinders us. It makes us prone to complain and feel sorry for ourselves. It makes us quick to criticize others and make excuses for ourselves. It makes us long for recognition and power.

In addition to everything, else, we are good Americans. We have been taught to measure success statistically. We have become bottom line oriented. That can cause problems for us because success in the ministry can't necessarily be measured statistically. When we don't see any results for all of our hard work, we can become frustrated. When we make careful plans and they don't work out, we can become discouraged.¹⁵

The doctrine of the divine call offers us comfort. When we have accepted a call, we can be certain that God himself has placed us into our office. He wants us to be in this particular place at this particular time. He

¹⁵ For an excellent discussion of the success mentality or syndrome in the ministry see Richard D. Balge, "The Gospel Ministry A Triumphant Procession in Christ," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, vol. 91, no. 1, (Winter 1994).

has also given us the means for accomplishing what he wants to accomplish. He has given us the means of grace, the gospel which is *his* power for salvation (Ro 1:16). We have his promise that his word will not return to him empty but will accomplish what he desires and will achieve his purpose (Isa 55:11). We can be content and leave the results up to him. Our Lord requires faithfulness of us (1 Co 4:1-2). In eternity we will see what he accomplished through the work he entrusted to us.

On the basis of statistics our Savior's earthly ministry was not very successful. After his bread of life discourse many of his followers were quite upset with his teaching. They said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it? From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (Jn 6:60, 66).

The great prophet Elijah once complained, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too" (1 Ki 19:10). In a very dramatic way God reminded him that the power of God in the ministry lies in the gentle whisper of his word (1 Ki 19:11-13). Elijah thought that he was the only believer left in Israel and that all his work had been in vain. The Lord reminded him that success in the ministry often is visible only to God. The Lord informed Elijah that he still preserved "seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him" (1 Ki 19:18).

We can't always see God's purposes. We can't always see the results of our labors. As ministers of the gospel, however, we can be certain that the Holy Spirit will accomplish what pleases *him*, not necessarily what pleases us. We can carry out our work in confidence knowing that the final outcome is in God's hands. We dare never forget the words surrounding the great commission. Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go....And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:18, 20). The One who rules the universe is with us and will make everything work out according to his plan and purpose.

The Lord of the Church gives us some special promises. After reminding the Corinthians that their final victory was guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection, Paul encouraged them, "Therefore my dear brethren, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that *your labor in the Lord is not in vain* (1 Co 15:58). Our Lord promises through the pen of Daniel, "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever" (Da 12:3).

Even our best efforts do not make us worthy of God's grace or worthy to serve in the holy ministry. Our Savior reminds us, "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants, we have only done our duty'" (Lk 17:10). Nevertheless in his grace and mercy God rewards our efforts and calls those who proclaim his good news of salvation "beautiful" (Isa 52:7).

Conclusion

When we look at all that God says about the public ministry of the gospel it becomes evident that there is no room in the ministry for pride or selfishness. There is no room for laziness or negligence. The ministry is God's, not ours. By nature we are not worthy to be called one of his children, let alone his spokesman or ambassador. Nevertheless he gives us that glorious privilege to serve him in this way. He provides us with his powerful means of grace to accomplish our task and has promised always to be with us. He guarantees that the success he desires will accompany our work in his kingdom. And then he glorifies and honors those who serve. Looking at all that our Lord has done for us we will join with the psalmist in declaring, "Not to us, O LoRD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness" (Ps 115:1).